

Lesson 2

I am at home in Europe (building a physical map I)

What I know about Europe

Learning objectives	The students “act out” Europe in the playground of their school. They develop a feeling for distance and closeness.
Student tasks	The students build a map of Europe in the playground of their school. They work in pairs on two countries they did research on. They start off with laying out the countries and borders. They indicate where they come from.
Resources	Printed copies of the map of Europe as templates, country portraits, coloured paper, atlas.
Methods	Pair and group work.

Information box

The term “physical map” is used in two different senses. Firstly, a physical map in the context of cartography describes a map which shows identifiable landmarks such as mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans and other permanent geographic features. Secondly, the term physical map is also used in the context of genetics, where it describes how much DNA separates two genes and is measured in base pairs, as opposed to a genetic map.

In the context of this series of lessons about Europe we use the term “physical map” in the cartographic sense but also in a very active sense – with the students “acting out” the maps themselves. Only by doing so can the difficult spatial relationships, the concept of borders, the length of rivers and the height of mountains be grasped by students at primary level. This also helps students to understand the social aspects of living together on the European continent. By actually building and then “standing in” the countries, the students can physically perceive their neighbours and can understand boundaries and barriers such as foreign languages, culture and other country-related differences more easily. The concept of building a physical map ties in to aspects of learning by doing and concrete experiences.

Lesson description

The students work in pairs on the two countries they have done research on at home (the task received at the end of lesson 1). They bring to the lesson the country portraits and all the information they have collected about their countries. They also bring their maps of Europe.

The whole class gathers in the school playground. The teacher instructs the students to build a physical map of Europe using the different kinds of material available. Two students work on each country. The teacher sets the framework of the map by defining the area in which the students can work.

Next, the students start laying out the borders of the countries. They have to make sure that the right countries are next to each other. Then they can indicate the capital cities and the flags on the layout.

Having done this, every student should stand in his/her country and begin a dialogue with the student in the neighbouring country. They should exchange information about each other’s countries. Invisible barriers might arise, such as having to speak a foreign language. As a result of the country portrait that every student has filled in, it should be possible for each student to exchange a few words with one another in “their” country’s language. The rest of the dialogue can take place in their mother tongue. The students should try to have as many dialogues as possible with their classmates in neighbouring countries.